

THEME

Stigma & Misinformation

Stigma and misinformation are very common themes for public assistance. Negative views towards programs like CalFresh can discourage enrollment and participation. Those seeking help may feel shame or have inaccurate information. In 2016, the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial County found that 60% of households participating in CalFresh felt stigma or embarrassment for receiving the benefits.⁴⁰

Community members need more dignified support and trusted messengers in order to enroll into and navigate CalFresh programming. Many may have negative past experiences or misinformed views, which fuels mistrust towards the program.

“ I’ve never asked for help because one lady told me about her experience. She didn’t qualify even though she had a disabled son. [I thought,] if she didn’t qualify, then how could I qualify and I never wanted to go back.”

– REGION 2, SOUTH LOS ANGELES

WHAT IS...

STIGMA?

People seeking help may feel judged or looked down upon for accessing public benefits like CalFresh. This negative perception is considered a stigma.

Trust building in communities that have endured generational trauma require services to meet their psychological safety. For the communities that participated in this project, these experiences may include geopolitical events like Khmer Rouge genocide and Salvadoran Civil Wars. Many experience fear and trauma from United States-based policies such as public charge and family separation. For people seeking help, trauma-informed services are mindful of their needs and unique situations.

MISINFORMATION?

It can be dangerous when false or inaccurate information is spread. This is known as misinformation, which may discredit community support services and programs.



WHAT IS "PUBLIC CHARGE"?

Changes to immigration rules can cause confusion and spread misinformation. This is particularly true with the public charge rule between the Trump and Biden administrations. Public charge is a "test" used by immigration officials to determine a person's likelihood of primarily depending on government assistance. Eligible immigrants can get public benefits without failing the public charge test. Yet, many still fear it may impact their pathway to citizenship or a green card and/or harm someone in their mixed status household. As of March 2021, the public charge rule was updated. Programs like CalFresh, WIC, Medi-Cal, and Head Start do not affect the public charge test. Even though this is good news, changes like these require a rebuilding of trust between communities and public assistance programs.